DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 202 611 PS 012 225

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TITLE Parenting Books: What Variables Are Associated with High Usage.
PUB DATE [81]
NOTE 13p.; May not reproduce clearly due to faint type.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adults; *Books; *Females; *Parent Education; *Readability; *Reading Ability; Use Studies
IDENTIFIERS Frequency Analysis; *Parenting Materials

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine: (1) how frequently each of 32 parenting books was totally or partially read by mothers in a parent education program, (2) which of the 32 titles were most popular, (3) whether the readability level of the books was associated with the reading competency of the readers who chose them, and (4) whether reading competency was associated with the number of books read. Twenty-eight well educated, middle- or upper-middle class women between 25 and 43 years of age who were enrolled in an informal church-related parent education program served as subjects for the study. Subjects were given a list of readily available parenting books that were recommended by the instructor of the parent education program and were asked to indicate the books they had partially or totally read. The reading competency of the women was measured using a cloze procedure. Readability of the 32 books was determined through the use of the Flesch Reading Ease formula. It was found that, on average, each woman read parts of 5.64 parenting books and all of 3.79 parenting books. Books by Briggs, Spock, and Ginott were most often reported as read in their entirety. Books by Gordon, Spock, and Dobson were most often reported as read in part. The readability of a given book was not associated with reading competency of women who chose it. Better readers read more books partially than totally and poorer readers read more books totally than partially. (Author/RH)

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ED202611

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PARENTING BOOKS: WHAT VARIABLES ARE ASSOCIATED WITH HIGH USAGE

By

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ABSTRACT

The study looked at (1) how frequently 32 parenting books were totally and partially read, (2) which of the 32 titles were most popular, (3) whether the readability level of the book was associated with reading competency of the reader and (4) whether reading competency was associated with the number of books read.

The findings were:

(1) an average of 5.64 parenting books were reported partially read and an average of 3.79 parenting books were totally read

(2) Your Child's Self-Esteem by Dorothy Briggs, Baby and Child Care by Benjamin Spock, and Between Parent and Child by Haim Ginott were reported as the parenting books totally read most often; Parent Effectiveness Training by Thomas Gordon, Baby and Child Care by Benjamin Spock, and Dare to Discipline by James Dobson were reported partially read most often

(3) readability of book was not associated with reading competency for this well-educated sample of women

(4) better readers read more books partially than totally and poorer readers read more books totally than partially

PARENTING BOOKS: WHAT VARIABLES ARE ASSOCIATED WITH HIGH USAGE

Introduction

A recent study by Cotts and associates (1977) indicated that parents preferred to read books on childrearing above nine other methods of learning about the parenting role. This finding was true regardless of their educational level, socioeconomic status, or race.

There are literally thousands of parenting books in print today. A review of the literature showed that no study had been done to determine which parenting books were read most often or to determine which variables were associated with parenting books read most frequently.

Specifically, the purpose of the study attempted to determine: (1) how frequently 32 parenting books were totally and partially read, (2) which of the 32 titles were most popular, (3) whether the readability level of the book was associated with reading competency of the reader and (4) whether reading competency was associated with the number of books read.

The Research Design

The Sample

Twenty-eight women enrolled in an informal church related parent education program served as subjects for the study. The parent program met once a week for the entire school year. The women were between 25 and 43 years of age, had from one to three children, were married, and could be classified as belonging to the middle- or upper-middle class. All of the women had high school diplomas, most had baccalaureate degrees, and a few had completed some graduate work.

Procedure

The women were given a list of 32 parenting books presented in alphabetic order by author. The 32 books were (1) concerned with general childrearing skills, (2) available at a library near the subjects' home, and (3) appeared on a recommended reading list compiled by the instructor of the parent education program. The 32 books are listed in Table 1.

The women were asked to indicate which of the 32 parenting books they had partially or totally read. Partial reading of a book was defined as reading less than half the book. Total reading of a book was defined as reading half or more of a book. The women took about ten minutes of class time to complete this procedure.

Instrumentation

The reading competency of the women was measured using a cloze procedure. The cloze procedure was developed by taking a passage of 250 words and deleting every fifth word and replacing the missing word with a blank of a standard length (Taylor, 1953). The cloze procedure was reported in percent of words filled in correctly. Synonyms were considered incorrect. Only exact words or slight misspellings were counted as correct. The cloze procedure has been found to correlate between .61 and .87 with standardized reading tests and is considered an effective method of measuring reading competency (Bormouth, 1965).

The readability of the 32 books was determined through the use of the Flesch Reading Ease formula (Flesch, 1948). According to Klare (1963) the Flesch formula is a reliable two-factor formula for measuring readability of adult books. Seven 100-word samples were

randomly drawn from each of the parenting books and averaged to calculate an overall readability score for each book. According to Klare (1963) this procedure should reliably measure the readability of a book.

Readability in its broadest sense is the sum total of all elements within a given piece of written material that effects the success a reader will have with it (Chall, 1958). The readability formulas attempt to identify and measure language factors highly associated with reading comprehension. In a word, readability formulas quantify those elements of the author's style that make the writing easy or difficult to read. Flesch Reading Ease scores generally range from zero to 100 with the higher scores indicating the less difficult reading.

The readability levels of the 32 books presented to the women ranged from 36.25, representing difficult reading, to 79.19, representing fairly easy reading. (Abram and Dowling, 1979).

Findings

How Frequently 32 Parenting Books Were Partially and Totally Read

The entire group of 28 women reported 158 partial readings and 106 total readings of the 32 books. This averaged out to 5.64 books reported as having been partially read per woman and 3.79 books reported as having been totally read per woman.

Separate rank orderings were made of the books reported partially and totally read. Table 1 shows the rank ordering of partially read books and Table 2 shows the rank ordering of totally read books.

---- Place Table 1 and 2 about here ----

The most popular titles for partial reading of a book were: Parent Effectiveness Training by Thomas Gordon (reported 11 times), Baby and Child Care by Benjamin Spock (reported 10 times), Dare to Discipline by James Dobson (reported 7 or more times) and Child Behavior by Ilg and Ames (reported 7 or more times).

The most popular titles for total reading of a book were: Your Child's Self-Esteem by Dorothy Briggs (reported 14 times), Baby and Child Care by Benjamin Spock (reported 14 times) and Between Parent and Child by Hiam Ginott (reported ten times).

Correlation of Readability of Book and Reading Competency of the Reader

Correlations were computed between the mean readability level of books reported read and the reading competency to the reader. A correlation of 0.12 was computed for books reported partially read and 0.13 for books reported totally read. Both correlations were not significant at the 0.05 level.

Association of Reading Competency and Number of Books Read

The median score on the cloze procedure was used to divide the women into a lower and a higher reading competency group. The number of books reported partially and totally read were compared to the subjects' reading competency. The Chi Square analysis (see Table 3) was significant beyond the .05 level (X^2 - 19.08, $p < .05$). This analysis appears to indicate that women with higher reading competency read more books partially than totally and women with lower reading competency read more books totally than partially.

---- Place Table 3 about here ----

Discussion and Conclusions

It was concluded that the parents in this study were reading parenting books, both partially and totally, to a considerable degree as the Cotts study indicated. Furthermore, it was concluded that the most popular titles for this group of women were (combining the number of books that were read totally and partially):

Baby and Child Care by Benjamin Spock

Your Child's Self-Esteem by Dorothy Briggs

Between Parent and Child by Hiam Ginott

Parent Effectiveness Training by Thomas Gordon

In addition, it was concluded that for this group of women readability of book was not associated with choice of parenting books regardless of whether the book was read either partially or totally. However, it should be noted that the mean readability of the 32 books on the survey instrument was 59.10 which is the reading level of an average high school student (Klare, note 1). The range of the readability on the 32 books was between 36.25 (college reading level) and 79.19 (sixth grade reading level). Moreover, the women in the study were all high school graduates and most had attended college. Consequently, the majority of the reading materials were well within the reading range of the women. Thus, it would not seem fair to generalize the findings of this study to women with lesser reading skill where readability level of book may well limit their understanding of the written material.

It was also concluded that reading competency was an important factor in determining whether a book was partially or totally read. Perhaps the most interesting finding of the study was that women with higher reading competency read more books partially than totally and

that women with lower reading competency read more books totally than partially. One may conjecture why the better readers would partially read so large a proportion of books. Perhaps better readers became bored more easily. Or, perhaps better readers purposefully only partially read a book. This second explanation would be in line with Knowles' (1975) concept of proactive reading. The proactive reader would purposefully read only those portions of the books that one had predetermined to be of use. This study does not allow for an interpretation of whether boredom, proactive reading, or other factors might be responsible for this finding. However, the finding is interesting to note and suggests the need for future research to probe what portions of the book were read and why these portions were chosen. Such research might lead to better understanding of how to format parenting books to allow partial reading to produce maximum learning per time spent.

Table 1

Rank Ordering of Books Reported as Having Been Partially Read by the Entire Group of Subjects

Number of Times Read	Title	Author
11	Parent Effectiveness Training	Gordon, T.
10	Baby and Child Care	Spock, B.
9	Dare to Discipline	Dobson, J.
8	The Magic Years	Fraiberg, S.
8	Your Child's Self-Esteem	Briggs, D.
8	Between Parent and Child	Ginott, H.
7	Child Behavior	Ilg & Ames
6	Infant & Child in the Culture of Today	Gesell, Ilg, & Ames
6	How to Survive Parenthood	LeShan, E.
6	Peoplemaking	Satir, V.
6	How to Raise a Brighter Child	Beck, J.
6	Your Preschool Child	Burnett, D.
6	The Challenge of Parenthood	Dreikurs, R.
6	On "How do Your Children Grow"	LeShan, E.
5	Is Your Child in the Wrong Grade	Ames, L.
4	New Ways of Discipline	Baruch, D.
4	Dialogues with Mothers	Bettelheim, B.
4	How to Parent	Dodson, F.
4	Children the Challenge	Dreikurs & Stoltz
4	Child Psychology	Jersild, A.
4	What Every Child Would Like His Parents to Know	Salk, L.
4	Problems of Parents	Spock, B.
3	A Child's Mind	Beadle, M.
3	Liberated Parents - Liberated Children	Faber & Mazlish
3	The Child Under Six	Hymes, J.
3	Parents Ask	Ilg & Ames
3	Changing Children's Behavior	Krumboltz & Krumboltz
3	What Every Child Needs	Peairs & Peairs
3	Life Among the Giants	Young, L.
3	Better Late Than Early	Moore & Moore
2	Understanding Children	Gardner, R.
2	Thinking is Child's Play	Sharp, E.

Table 2

Rank Ordering of Books Reported as Having Been Totally Read by the Entire Group of Subjects

Number of Times Read	Title	Author
14	Your Child's Self-Esteem	Briggs, D.
14	Baby and Child Care	Spock, B.
10	Between Parent and Child	Ginott, H.
8	How to Parent	Dodson, F.
8	What Every Child Would Like His Parents to Know	Salk, L.
7	Parent Effectiveness Training	Gordon, T.
5	Peoplemaking	Satir, V.
4	The Magic Years	Fraiberg, S.
4	Children the Challenge	Dreikurs & Stoltz
3	How to Raise a Brighter Child	Beck, J.
3	Infant and Child in the Culture of Today	Gesell, Ilg & Ames
3	How to Survive Parenthood	LeShan, E.
3	Dare to Discipline	Dobson, J.
2	The Challenge of Parenthood	Dreikurs, R.
2	Child Behavior	Ilg & Ames
2	Dialogues with Mothers	Bettelheim, B.
2	Liberated Parents - Liberated Children	Faber & Mazlish
2	Understanding Children	Gardner, R.
1	Problems of Parents	Spock, B.
1	The Child Under Six	Hymes, J.
1	On "How do Your Children Grow"	LeShan, E.
1	Your Preschool Child	Burnett, D.
0	A Child's Mind	Beadle, M.
0	Child Psychology	Jersild, A.
0	Changing Children's Behavior	Krumboltz & Krumboltz
0	Thinking is Child's Play	Sharp, E.
0	Better Late than Early	Moore & Moore
0	Is Your Child in the Wrong Grade	Ames, L.
0	Life Among the Giants	Young, L.
0	What Every Child Needs	Peairs & Peairs
0	Parents Ask	Ilg & Ames
0	New Ways of Discipline	Baruch, D.

Table 3

Number of Books Reported Having Been
Partially and Totally Read by Women
With Lower and Higher Reading Competency

Reading Competency	Books Read		
	Partially	Totally	Total
Lower	45	59	104
Higher	113	47	160
Total	158	106	264

* $X^2 = 19.08$, $p < .05$

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